



Coping with the Aftermath of a Disaster

People have lost loved ones, and many more members of the community have shared their sense of loss and the shock that resulted from this event.

Some people may be living in very difficult circumstances. This disruption and dislocation only adds to the stress of the loss and the disaster itself. Your future may be uncertain. You may have financial concerns and feel that things will never be “normal” again.

You are living through experiences that can be emotionally traumatic. They would challenge anyone's ability to cope. As the disaster recovery continues, the experience will challenge even more of everyone's coping skills and emotions.

Coping

- Healing and recovering from the emotional effects of the event will take a long time. When you can, allow yourself to feel sadness and grief over what has happened. Talking to others about how you are feeling is important.
- Try to keep in place family routines such as regular meal times and other family rituals. These will help you to feel as though your life has some sense of order.
- Upsetting times can cause people to drink alcohol or to use drugs in a way that causes other problems. Try to cope with your stress without increasing your use of alcohol and drugs. Alcohol and drugs won't help in the long run.
- Healthy practices such as eating well and getting enough sleep are especially important in times of high stress.
- Forgive yourself and others when you act out because you are stressed. This is a difficult time, and everyone's emotions are closer to the surface. But also be certain that your stress does not become an excuse for child abuse or spouse abuse.
- Don't let yourself become isolated. Maintain connections with your community friends, relatives, neighbors, co-workers, or church members. Talk about your experiences with them.

When to Seek Support from a Mental Health Professional

A few general guidelines may be useful in deciding when normal reactions to disaster become problems requiring assistance:

1. When disturbing behaviors or emotions last more than six to eight weeks;
2. when a person's behaviors or emotions make it difficult to function normally (including functioning at work, in the family, or at school); or
3. any time an individual feels unstable or concerned about his or her behaviors or emotions.